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Violence signifies long stay in Iraq

By Jim Michaels and Donna Leinwand, USA TODAY

BAGHDAD — A truck bombing that killed at least 17 people and battles that left two American soldiers dead marked one of the bloodiest 24 hours in this capital since it fell to coalition forces on April 9.



A U.S. soldier guards a car which exploded outside the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad.

By Marwan Naamani, AFP

U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, commander of coalition forces in Iraq, said Thursday the attacks underscore why U.S. forces will be in Iraq for two years as an "absolute minimum" and "probably longer." (**Related audio:** [Jordanian official reacts](#))

Secretary of State Colin Powell, in Washington, said that "slowly and surely," coalition forces will restore peace and stability in Iraq.

Until late Wednesday night, when the two U.S. soldiers were killed during a firefight here, no U.S. military personnel had been killed by hostile fire in four days. U.S. commanders had begun to speak cautiously about a slowing pace of attacks as a sign that an aggressive campaign to attack and capture resistance leaders had worked — and that U.S. troops could now concentrate more on building goodwill within Iraq.

The two deaths brought to 56 the number of U.S. military personnel killed by hostile action since May 1, when President Bush declared the end of major combat operations in Iraq.

Late Thursday, the Pentagon identified one of the casualties as Army Staff Sgt. Brian Hellerman, 35, of Freeport, Minn. He was assigned to C Company, 2nd Battalion, 325th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division, from Fort Bragg, N.C. The name of the other soldier had not been released.

News of those deaths hadn't been made public when the truck bomb went off outside the Jordanian Embassy about 11 a.m. (3 a.m. ET) Thursday.

Iraqi and U.S. officials believe the blast, which injured about 60 people, came from an SUV packed with explosives that was parked on a divided highway outside. The dead included five Iraqi police officers.

No one had claimed responsibility by late Thursday. Any of several elements could be to blame. Jordan's

decision to grant asylum to Saddam Hussein's elder daughters, Raghda and Rana, angers some Iraqis who opposed Saddam. Iraqis who supported the dictator are angry that Jordan cooperated with the United States in its war on Saddam's regime. Islamic militants also are angry with Jordan for helping the United States pursue Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

The bombing shook a city where life had started to return to normal. "Where is the security?" said Noor Jassim Ferhan, 28, who was injured. She is unemployed and had been in the embassy processing a visa so she could leave Iraq. "During Saddam's days, we didn't have these attacks." Ferhan's head was bandaged and her blouse was soaked with blood. She spoke in a whisper from her hospital bed.

Just a few hours after the bombing, American soldiers in Baghdad were involved in another street fight. Witnesses and military officials said attackers used an explosive to blow up an U.S. military Humvee parked on a busy street. Some witnesses said attackers then fired a rocket-propelled grenade and shot automatic weapons at U.S. troops who responded.

"This was a planned attack," said Army Spc. Scott Buttrumm, who responded to the ambush.

U.S. forces blasted at a building with heavy weapons, witnesses said. Hours after the attack, a Humvee lay smoking on the median, and two helicopter gunships flew low overhead.

Contributing: Glen C. Carey and wire reports

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